"THE ELDERS THAT RULE WELL."

A SERMON,

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SERMON.

I TIMOTHY, V, 17.

"LET THE ELDERS THAT RULE WELL, BE COUNTED WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOR."

The prosperity of any society is greatly dependent on its government. This must be adapted, in all its provisions to the peculiar object of the organization; and it must be efficiently executed by those to whom it is committed. As the object varies, the provisions to secure it must. A literary society and a military company, a college and a prison cannot be ruled in the same way. So the Church of God, whose objects are all spiritual requires a very different kind of ruling from a body which aims only at external or worldly advantage. That the provisions of that government which the King of Zion has given to his Church on earth,—are perfectly adapted to secure its great design, we dare not doubt. It only remains then for the Church faithfully to carry them out. It is therefore a matter of the deepest interest to her, one most intimately connected with the Saviour's glory and the Soul's Salvation—to ascertain precisely what these provisions are; and that her rulers ever keep their exact nature and design in view,—in order that they may not, by unfaithfulness to their high trust, defeat the very object of their appointment. Just such an interest attaches itself to the subject brought before us in the text—the dignity and importance of the office of Ruling Elder,—a subject deemed not inappropriate to the present occasion. Three points of inquiry are in this passage presented to us. Who are these Elders? What is the rule they exercise? And what the honor which is their due?

1. The term Elder or Presbyter was the general term used by the Jews to denote their subordinate rulers, whether civil or ecclesiastical. Hence it very naturally came to be employed to designate the rulers in the New Testament Church. The manner in which the term is used in the book of Acts and in the Epistles,—at the very beginning of the Christian Church implies that these officers were already well known, and discharged functions well understood. The term itself, however, can give us no idea of their rank or functions, any more than the term Ruler, to which it is entirely equivalent. Nor is there any account of their first appointment—nor any formal notice of the precise position they held—or the duties they discharged. To ascertain then, who these *ruling* elders spoken of in the text were, we must resort to other sources.

One thing indeed is very evident from the text in its connection—that they were not the public teachers of the Church. Elders were evidently of

two kinds,—one ruling only, the other, ruling and teaching. The verse before us admits of no other interpretation. "Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." If, as has been intimated by some, these last were to be especially honoured or rewarded, because of their *laborious* efforts in teaching, while it was the duty of the first to do the same, it would be hard to see, not why the last should be honoured more, but why the first should be honoured at all—being guilty of a neglect of duty. The language implies that both classes did their duty—but that the latter had more to do than the former, and hence deserved a greater reward. So far then, it is clear from this passage—that the word elder includes two classes of Church rulers,—the one distinguished from the other, by having superadded to the function of ruling, that of teaching.

Since, however, this term is not more clearly defined, the knowledge possessed by the early Church rendering this unnecessary,—how shall we more definitely ascertain the kind of rulers to which it is applied? Clearly, in but one way. We must endeavour to place ourselves in the position of the primitive Church as it was emerging from Judaism; and if we can find any institutions then and previously existing with which they were familiar, and which, to their apprehension, fixed the meaning of the language of the inspired writers when they spoke of Bishops and Elders—then whatever that meaning is, must be the true one. If they were already familiar with certain officers, called Bishops and Elders, and Paul and others writing for their instruction used these terms without explanation, then according to all laws of correct interpretation, we must take them in the same sense in which they necessarily understood them; as this must have been the sense designed by the inspired writers. The appeal then made here to the constitution of the Jewish Synagogue, is not an appeal to it as a rule of faith and practice to make up some deficiency in this respect in the inspired word, but simply as a matter of lexicography,—to ascertain the meaning and application of a word.

It is an interesting fact, and beautifully in accordance with all the rest of God's plans—that the same event, the Babylonish captivity, which destroyed those objects which were the glory of the ancient ceremonial system, and the special marks of the divine favour, the Ark, the visible presence, the Urim and Thummim and the Sacred fire,—thus teaching that that whole system was passing away—that same event, if it did not originate, as it probably did,—at least brought into general use the system of Synagogue worship, which in the end was destined to take the place of the former.—This mode of worship was purely moral or spiritual, not at all ceremonial; and consisted in the reading and exposition of the Scriptures and prayer every Sabbath day.—Luke 4: 16. Acts 15; 21. Each Synagogue, we are told by learned men on the authority of Jewish writers, had a plurality of rulers, at least three, called Elders or Bishops, chosen by the people them-

selves, one of whom acted as President, and was called by emphasis "the ruler" or "the chief ruler." This is confirmed by the New Testament itself—where "the rulers of the Synagogue" are spoken of—see Acts 13; 15, and where one of these rulers is distinguished from the rest by the very terms just mentioned. Acts 18; 8, 17. He as presiding in its worship, and directing in the reading and exposition of the law,—and especially as leading their devotions—offering the public prayers, was called "the Angel of the Synagogue,"—a term applied hence in the Apocalypse to the teachers of the Church.*

Now that same captivity that brought this system into use began to scatter the Jews as permanent residents in other lands—and subsequent events completed this dispersion all over the civilized world: so that Synagogues were to be found almost every where, embracing a form of worship and system of government well adapted to the spiritual nature of the New Dispensation, and just ready to be turned into Christian Churches; wherever and whenever the worshippers would receive Jesus as their expected Messiah. In them first, the Gospel was preached by the Apostles wherever they went. Christianity came not to the Jews as a new religion, but the perfection of their own, the consummation of their fondest hopes. Accordingly if the glad news of Jesus of Nazareth were received by any Synagogue or a majority of it, it became at once a Christian Church; or if a minority only received it and separated from their brethren, they would naturally form another Synagogue—a Christian one—a Church for the worship of God. And when converts were made from among the Gentiles in places where there was no Synagogue—still, since they embraced the Jehovah and the Messiah of the Jews as their God and Saviour, they would necessarily adopt the form of worship and organization used by those whose religion they adopted. Thus naturally and necessarily the Bishops or Elders of the Synagogue became the Bishops or Elders of the Church; and whatever these terms meant in the Jewish Synagogue, they continued to mean in the Christian Church which was merely the continuation of it; and whatever were their functions there, the same would be their functions still—with only such modifications as the change of dispensation required. By "elders" therefore the people would necessarily understand the officers in each Jewish Congregation called by that name—the number of whom varied with its size, one however being more prominent than the others. In no other way could the writers of the New Testament have been understood by the people to whom they addressed

*That there was an actual distinction between the teaching and ruling elders of the Synagogue, all the writers seem to be agreed—some, however, holding that this was only a matter of private arrangement between themselves—but others holding that each of these classes had a distinct ordination, one to teaching—the other to ruling only. It should also be remembered as confirming this view of the origin of the system of Church government laid down in the New Testament, that every Synagogue had its Deacons, who took care of the collections, &c. In the excellent work of Dr. Miller on the Ruling Elder—which should be studied by every one holding this office—the testimonies of the learned on this subject are given with sufficient fullness to satisfy all.

themselves; for if they had intended to have expressed by these familiar terms an entirely different kind of elder or presbyter of whom each Congregation had but one, in whom were vested both the right of teaching and the power of ruling—they would have been compelled to define it carefully—as this would have been an entirely new use of the term. There is then no avoiding the conclusion that when we read in the New Testament of a plurality of elders in connection with each Church, as we do, Acts 14; 23, Titus 1; 5, and many other places, we must understand—a number of men chosen by the people,—to whom was committed the government of the Church—and one at least of whom was distinguished from the rest by being the authorized public teacher. Now when all this is taken in connection with the fact, that we read of elders in the Church of Jerusalem—at a very early date, as officers of well-known and acknowledged authority—and that pains were taken to have them ordained in every city and Church, we think we have a clear Divine Warrant for the Office of Ruling Elder. This conclusion receives further confirmation from those passages which speak of the talent of ruling as a special gift, and of government as a distinct office in the Church, (Rom. 12; 6–8, 1 Cor. 12; 28,) showing that among the gifts and offices with which the Spirit furnished the Church, was one which consisted essentially in ruling.

It may not be amiss to pause here a moment to consider the wonderful providence of God in causing this system to spring up in the midst of his Ancient Church, not merely to preserve among them the knowledge of the truth, but also that there might be ready formed a system of organization the working of which was well understood, which was every where to be found over the empire—which would naturally be every where adopted by the Church, and was eminently suited to her wants as she was about to burst her narrow limits, and go up to the conquest of the world. His wisdom had so ordered it that the Church in going forth with the glad message of mercy to the Nations, had nothing to do, but just to throw off the yoke that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear; she had no untried harness to put on, nor any new hierarchical or democratical system to frame; she found herself already possessed, through the provident wisdom of her divine Head, of all she needed, in the ruling and teaching elders she already had. And hence it is that so little is said on this subject in the New Testament. There was no room to say much, for there was nothing new done. The eminent spirituality and the aggressive nature of this new dispensation, and her heterogeneous membership—of mingled Jews and Gentiles, rendered it necessary that especial *care* should be taken in the selection of these officers, and hence the only point specially dwelt upon is the qualifications they should possess. 1 Tim. 3; 2–7. Tit. 1; 5–9.

All this goes to show the importance of the office, as one not devised by human wisdom to meet any exigency of the Church as she was passing through hat great change from the old to the new dispensation; but prepared by

divine wisdom and rendered honourable and familiar by the continuance of ages;—its adoption confirmed by apostolic authority, and its qualifications specially and repeatedly laid down.

II. Consider secondly, the rule these elders are to exercise. What is it to "rule well?" We might properly deduce this from the very design of the Church. She is God's witness-bearer, the light of the world and the salt of the earth. This design she is to accomplish not merely by a naked testimony to the truth in her teaching, but by its beauty and power being made visible in action; it must be lived as well as taught. The great end then of Church organization, and the object of Church rulers must be to secure holiness of life. This is partly attained by excluding the openly immoral and grossly inconsistent. Care therefore in the admission of members, and faithfulness in discipline are essential duties of a Church ruler. But though of prime importance, they are the smallest part of them, and being generally acknowledged, and less likely to be neglected than some others, we shall not dwell upon them. What obscures the glory and cripples the energies of the Church, is not so much gross inconsistencies that can be reached by the rod of discipline, as that lukewarmness and worldliness which is so apt to pervade the spirit of her people, and quench their love and zeal. So long as she preserves in heart and life her separation from the world, she is strong; but when she breaks her Nazarite's vow, she is like Sampson shorn of his locks. The great thing needed, therefore, is to bring an influence to bear as constantly as possible upon the hearts of all her members, to counteract the insidious advances of the world;—an influence that shall follow the individual believer from the house of God to his own fireside, and as far as may be in his social intercourse, throwing around him an affectionate restraint, and a welcome stimulus to duty, and causing him to feel the reality and intimacy of his connection with the visible body of Christ. Now it is to meet this want, to exert just this influence so necessary to keep up the spirituality of the Church, that Christ has appointed in addition to the teaching elder, a plurality of ruling elders in each church. The general nature of their duties therefore as spiritual rulers is manifest. But the Bible gives us something much more definite than this. And as it is very desirable to ascertain the exact aspect in which this "ruling" is presented to us in the word of God without any human additions or modifications, it will be best to confine ourselves to the exposition of those terms by which the office is described by the inspired writers,—bishops, pastors, guides, watchers for souls.

1. Ruling elders are bishops in the strict and only scriptural sense. The words "bishop" and "elder," all admit, are interchangeably used in the New Testament, with this difference of meaning, however, that the word "elder" expresses the simple idea of ruling and nothing more; "bishop," the nature of that rule. Examples of this usage are found in Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus, in which he calls them bishops, or overseers—the same word in the original, (Acts 20; 28; and in Titus 1; 5, 7.) Now the word

"bishop," which is an English corruption of the Greek word, means an overseer or inspector, and being applied to all the rulers of the Church, teaches that the very same oversight and inspection which the teaching elder is bound and expected to exercise, is also required of the ruling elder. This is the very nature and essence of his office. He is to look into the State of the Church, diligently observing the spiritual condition of its members, watching for the evidences of their growth or decline, stimulating them by suitable admonitions, warnings, and encouragements to a diligent and earnest use of the means of grace, and a faithful and steadfast discharge of all the great duties to which by their solemn public vows they stand pledged. The Church is in an enemy's country, ever surrounded by foes. The safety and success of an army thus situated depends greatly on the vigilant inspection of the men by their officers, seeing that every man be in his place, his wants properly supplied, and his arms and ammunition in order. Such an inspection are ruling elders to be ever exercising in the Church of Christ.

2. The ruling elder is a pastor also. This term has come to be appropriated in common usage exclusively to the preaching elder, as occupying the most prominent place in the session or parochial presbytery. But this is far from the scriptural usage, according to which it belongs equally to all the rulers of the Church, and is designed to point out the nature of their rule. The very same terms which are relied on to show the duties of the preacher, as a pastor, are used to designate the duties of all the elders of the Church; indeed, they denote a minister's duties only when he is spoken of as a ruler and classed with the ruling elders. In the address of Paul to the elders of Ephesus, he charges them "*to feed the Church of God.*" "To feed" here presents a very inadequate idea of the original, which means "to shepherd" —to perform all the duties of a shepherd or pastor. By this word the apostle intimates how they were to discharge that oversight with which the Holy Ghost had entrusted them,—just as a shepherd takes care of his flock.— While it was given to the teaching elder as his appropriate and peculiar duty, to draw from the word of God, and furnish to the flock all needful spiritual aliment and in such form as to be adapted to their spiritual condition,* all the ruling elders were to share equally with him the responsibilities of a pastor. This is no mere doubtful inference from the passage; it is its direct and necessary meaning, and can have no other, unless all the elders here mentioned be teaching elders—and we make nonsense of the text. Peter also in his first epistle—in his charge to elders—ch. 5; 1–4, uses the very same language: "Feed "—act the part of a shepperd to—"the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, &c." And it would be impossible to show that in the interesting passage—Eph. 4; 11—"He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some,

* This is expressed in the original by a different word, even when the same figure of a shepherd is used; as in our Lord's thrice repeated charge to Peter, (John 21; 15–17,)—the first and third is strictly to *feed*, the second though translated the same —is *to shepherd*. See Trench's Synonyms of New Testament.

pastors, and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, (i. e. serving the church,) for the edifying of the body of Christ;" the word "pastors" does not include all the rulers of the church, especially as teachers are distinctly mentioned. The usage of the language, the connection, its harmony with other passages forbid its restriction to the teaching elder. As certainly then as that there is an office of ruling elder, just so certain is it, that his duties are those of a shepherd or pastor in the scriptural sense of these terms. Every elder is required to be ever exercising a shepherd's care over the sheep, watching the first appearance of disease, and promptly and faithfully applying the remedy; preventing them from wandering from the enclosures of the fold, taking care that the food served out by the teaching elder be the pure unadulterated truth of God, and using his utmost endeavors to help the people duly to appreciate these instructions, and diligently to practice them. The weak and the halting, the afflicted and tempted, must share largely in his sympathies and help. As shepherds, elders are also required to be diligent in their attention to the lambs of the flock—the baptised children of the church, ever watching over them with paternal solicitude; restraining, admonishing, instructing and warning them; seeing that they receive that religious training and are placed under those religious influences which their parents vowed at the baptismal altar to secure to them, and on which to so great a degree their usefulness and salvation, and the church's well-being depend. Perhaps in the whole circle of a church-ruler's duties there are none more important than these; none, the most diligent and prayerful attention to which, will be repaid with richer blessings; and none, the neglect of which, is fraught with sadder consequences to the church and to the world. Certainly none are more evidently and necessarily implied in shepherding the flock. The shepherd who neglects the lambs, will soon have no flock to keep.

3. The nature of this ruling, is still further shown by the elders being termed leaders or guides. In the passage, Heb., 13; 17, "Obey them that have the rule over you," the original word used for ruling is entirely different from that used in the text, and expresses strictly the idea of leading;—it thus describes them as those who rule others by leading or guiding them. This guidance being entirely spiritual, they are to effect both by affectionate exhortation and consistent example. They are to rule, not by the mere exercise of authority, or assuming the air of a superior, not "as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock," (1 Peter, 5; 3;)—ensamples—leaders in the attainment of every grace, in the performance of every duty. By the spirituality of their tempers, the brightness of their graces, the holiness of their lives, and the extent and readiness of their sacrifices for the cause of Christ, and the interests of a perishing world for which he died, are they to be conspicuous. The people of God in their perplexities and trials, when walking in darkness, and sore beset by temptations, must find in them intelligent, safe and sympathizing counsellors. In all those works of high and holy enterprise for Christ, which are now so

loudly demanding all the energes of the church: in every effort to win new triumphs for the Prince of Peace, and bring back a revolted world to God, and plant the standard of the cross on the demolished battlements of Satan's kingdom, they must lead. The Holy Spirit thus, by the use of this term, makes it their high distinction, as well as that of the preacher of the gospel.

> To train, by every rule,
> Of holy discipline, to glorious war
> The sacramental hosts of God's elect;

and by their humble and holy daring to cheer on his conquering bands to new and nobler victories. A wretched ruler indeed will he be, whose whole spirit and conduct will not proclaim more loudly and distinctly than the words of the Jewish captives as they wept by the river of Babylon could do it,—that he prefers Jerusalem above his chief joy. Such an elder, whether he be a teaching or a ruling one, can lead the church only to defeat and shame.

4. Ruling elders, as well as ministers, are "*watchers for souls.*" It is the rulers of the church, not the teachers only, of whom the apostle says to the Hebrews—ch. 13; 17,—"They watch for your souls as they that must give account." Words could not give us a more impressive idea than these do, of the awful importance and responsibility of the office of ruler in the church. Souls, immortal souls, my brethren and fathers in the eldership, are entrusted to your care; souls for which Christ died, and which he regards with more than an earthly parent's love:—with what intense solicitude, and holy earnestness, and self-denying zeal then, should you labour for their good. Of such a duty the importance can be equalled only by the difficulty. Many a minister of Christ has trembled in his inmost soul under the overwhelming sense of his responsibility, as he read this solemn passage; and like Paul among the Corinthians, has been among his people "in fear and in much trembling."—and that all his life long; sustained only by the precious promise of the great Shepherd, "My grace shall be sufficient for thee." But this awful watch is attributed to them in this passage not as teachers, but as rulers; it is therefore the sole duty of those who only rule, —the solemn summing up of all the duties of every ruler in the church of Christ. Its dread import should press with undivided stress upon the hearts of every ruling elder in the church, who in his ordination vows has solemnly promised faithfully to perform all the duties of his high office; and a happy day will it be for the church and for the world too, when the great mass of our ruling elders, as well as of our ministers tremble in view of these few but soul-stirring words.

In these four particulars we have done nothing but simply develope the meaning of the language of scripture applied to all the rulers of the church, and therefore, especially to ruling elders, since ruling constitutes their only duty. Nor have we added a single thought which is not legitimately included in those terms. Such, then, is the scriptural idea of ruling well. It is to perform the oversight and inspection of a bishop, the pastoral care of a

shepherd, the exemplary guidance of a leader, the awful watch for precious undying souls.

In closing this part of our subject there is another remark to be made, inferential from the preceding:—that in this ruling well there is not a duty required of the minister which is not required of the ruling elder. No term is applied to the one which is not applied to the other, except those denoting the authorized proclamation of the gospel, and the administration of its sacraments, which is inseparable from it*. The minister is the authorized public expositor of God's word, the commissioned messenger of Heaven to men (2 Cor. 5; 18–20,) and in this and this only– with its inseparable adjuncts—does he differ from the ruling elder. It is not as a bishop, or a pastor, or a leader, or a watcher for souls, that he is distinguished from them. These appellations he receives not as a teacher, but as a ruler, in which character both by the express teaching of God's word, and by the acknowledged principles of Presbyterianism, the ruling elder is on perfect equality with him. It is only in the function of *public* instruction, it will be observed, in which there is any distinction. For it is expressly laid down by the apostle in 1 Tim. 3; 2, as one of the qualifications of every ruler in the church, that he be "apt to teach;" and more fully in Tit. 1; 9. 'Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." And that this is necessary in order to "rule well," is very evident. He must be well acquainted with the law according to which he is to rule, with the whole system of divine truth, and have large experience of its workings in the human heart,—"not a novice," says Paul—that he may be always ready in the intercourse of social life to instruct the ignorant, to guide the erring, to comfort the distressed, to direct the enquirer, and to perform his duty in the admission and discipline of members. He needs not indeed to be versed in the varied knowledges that the public expounder of the word does; but without such knowledge as will enable him to teach the truth to the young and ignorant and erring, how can he act the part of a judicious overseer shepherd and guide? Whatever duty then, beside the public authoritative exhibition of the truth in the word and sacraments, the ruling elder feels his minister is bound to do in the way of visiting, and overseering and shepherding the flock, let him remember that he himself in connection with his fellow elders is especailly required by the word of God to do for that flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made him, as well as his minister, overseer; and betaking himself to the throne of grace, let him gird himself anew for these solemn and momentous duties.

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*Matt. 28; 19. Although admission to and exclusion from the sacraments is a necessary and important part of government, their administration evidently is not, and hence can form no part of the duty of a ruler as such. They are necessarily connected with teaching, their very design being to set forth by expressive symbols the great fundamental truths and blessings of the gospel, and the believing sinner's interest in these and dependence on them. They *are* teaching indeed in its most striking and impressive form—by making truth visible; their administration therefore belongs eminently and exclusively to the authorized teacher.

From this scriptural view of the office, its high dignity and vast importance is manifest; and it is evident also why the elders that rule well should be "counted worthy of double honor."

III. To this third point—the honour which is their due—we can devote but small space. Calvin, with his accustomed adherence to a closely logical interpretation, makes this honour to be called "double," in reference to the widows before mentioned; those who were widows indeed being such as are described in vs. 9–10, as noted for works of benevolence and self-denial.—Such were to be maintained by the church. But if these for their good works were entitled to a maintenance from the church in their need, much more were the elders that ruled well entitled to a double honour of the same kind, and above all those who laboured in the word and doctrine, and thus devoted their whole time to the church. This interpretation, we think, is generally admitted. That this honour means something beside mere respect and esteem is evident also from the reason given for this injunctiou, which immediately follows: "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his hire;" teaching clearly that the elders that ruled well were entitled to a degree at least of maintenance from the church, in proportion as they devoted to it their time and energies. The language of Peter in the passage before referred to, teaches the same thing. "Feed the flock of God," he says, "taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." There could be no danger now of a ruling elder accepting the office for filthy lucre; the existence of such a danger shows that in the primitive church—owing it may be in part to the necessities of its condition—all the rulers were regarded as entitled to a certain degree of support from the church. This goes still further to confirm the view already given of the extent of the duties implied in the elder's ruling, and that the office then held a prominence in view of the church that it does not now.

The same is evident from those passages in which obedience to and esteem for their *rulers*—as such, is enjoined upon the church. For example: 1 Thes. 5; 12, 13: "We beseech you, brethren, know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." And Heb. 5; 17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." Such love and obedience, together with the obligation to support them—implying a large devotement of their time and energies to official duties—throws around this office a dignity which well accords with its origin, its design, and its nature. But we hasten to a conclusion by observing,

1. The discrepancy between the simple scriptural view of this office, and the position it actually holds in view of the church. Here in the Bible it stands side by side with the ministry—the same language is so continually applied to both as rulers, that whole denominations have thence inferred that all were teachers, an inference not only unwarranted, but flatly contradicted, as we think, by our text, and which would require a number of teachers in every congregation. The moral and prudential qualifications for both as

rulers are stated in the same language, and also the obedience and love due to both; to both the same titles are applied; in all cases the preaching and ruling elders are classed together and treated as one body of rulers. But how is it in our practice? How in the general view of the church? Who thinks of ruling elders as bishops, as pastors, as leaders, as watchers for souls? Is it not unquestionable that in full contradiction to the meaning and application of these New Testament terms, as acknowledged by interpreters of all parties, they have become so exclusively appropriated to the teachers of the church, that few except those who critically study the Bible ever think of appropriating them to any other? The same is true in regard to nearly all our religious literature, in which these terms and passages of scripture that speak of church rulers, are regarded and quoted as if belonging exclusively to ministers. Our principles are correct; but is it not true that our langurge has been very much moulded by the usage of those whose principles were different, and as we think, less scriptural; and thus almost unconsciously have suffered ourselves to lose sight of this office in its true scriptural magnitude, and to fail in securing the benefit of our principles? Look too at our laboriously prepared statistical tables. While we have there not only a full catalogue of our ministers, but also of our licentiates, and the number of candidates even, and of members black and white, and many other things,—there is not a thing to show that there is such an important office in our church as the ruling elder. Does not our General Assembly practically ignore this office—when professedly summing up our strength, it leaves out all notice of these rulers—which form such a main element in our strength, and are a prime part of the distinctive glory of our system?* And how few of the large body of elders in our churches do any thing like exemplify the scriptural idea of ruling well. How general is the notion, that by serving the communion table, attending punctually on the meetings of session, and occasionally on other ecclesiastical bodies, they have exhausted the duties of their office? And how can it be otherwise? The church do not expect them to do any more than this, and we fear, would in many cases consider it, if not officious, yet at least a work of supererogation for their elders in their official character to visit from house to house, to converse and pray, and catechise the young. The reason of this great deficiency is not to be found in the elders themselves; the blame does not attach to them in any such degree as to the great body of the church in the low views they take of this office; and I fear that we who occupy the place of teachers will have to take upon ourselves most even of this. It is impossible for an officer to do more than the people who choose him, and whom he serves expect him to do. Only let the churches expect but little of ministers, and very soon they will have ministers from whom they will get but little. It is by the people having attained high views of the dignity and duties of the teaching elder, that this office is enabled to realize even as fully

*Why should we not have among our statistics, a column showing the number of our ruling elders?

as it does, the scriptural idea. The remedy then is plain. Let the people learn to look upon this office in its true scriptural light, let them expect much from their elders, encourage them in going forward to carry out the true idea of their office, and render to them all due honor and support in discharging their duties, and I am sure, such is the piety and devotedness of the great body of our eldership, that they will not be slow in meeting the weighty responsibilities of their office.

2. The effect of such a discharge of the duties of the eldership would be the greatly increased efficiency of the Ministry, and a highly elevated state of piety in the Church. Much fault has been found with the Ministry, on account of its supposed inefficiency. We are not going to exculpate them from all censure. We all, my brethren, have abundant reason, when we look upon our great exemplar, his days of toil and nights of prayer, his tears of compassion and consuming zeal, and how, in view of his bloody baptism, for us,

> "Forth to the task his spirit flew,—
> 'Twas love that urged him on:"

we have, I say, abundant reason to bow our heads in shame, and prostrate ourselves before *him* in deep humiliation. But the ministry cannot do the work of the ruling elders as well as their own; and the very general attempt to have them do it cannot but have, in a great degree, lessened their efficiency. To accomplish the great design of the Church, in reference even to her own members, a vast amount of work is to be done in visiting from house to house, in attending to the sick, strengthening the weak, guiding the wayward, reclaiming the backslider, comforting the mourner, exciting the sluggish, encouraging the timid, directing the zealous, training the ignorant, and watching over the young; so much, that after a minister has exhausted all his time and strength, he cannot begin to accomplish it. And in his attempt to do this, and also to bring forth out of his treasure, things new and old, for the edification and salvation of all—he feels, and often truly too, that nothing is more than half-done, if that.

Now the great Head of the Church never laid all this upon one man. The very object of a plurality of elders in each Church, evidently was, by a division of this labour, to secure the accomplishment of the whole. The great Shepherd has too much love to the sheep for whom he died, to leave them, even in regard to external means, so wretchedly provided for as they would be, if all this work was left to one man. The work of family visitation, constant oversight, pastoral care, watching for souls, is the only work, except discipline and admission of members, which the Head of the Church has given to the ruling elder,—and it is his grand work, as we have seen. To the teaching elder, the same duties indeed belong, but they are not his peculiar duties; family visitation and individual inspection are not his most important functions by any means, nor that for which he is specially set apart and ordained. It is only by dividing the duties of this pastoral oversight and watch among a number, that the condition of the whole flock

can be kept always under the eye of the whole body of its rulers. Thus the teaching elder would be enabled to adapt his instructions far more fully to the wants of his people, than he possibly could do were he dependent on his own personal intercourse alone for his knowledge of their condition; and then, too, his own visits could be so arranged often as to tell with much greater effect—while the larger portion of his time could be secured for his special and appropriate duties as teacher. Thus the pulpit instructions, the private intercourse, the pastoral visitations, and the catechetical exercises, would all be far better directed, and executed with tenfold efficiency.

And could such a course be pursued by any Church without its having a most happy effect in elevating its piety, increasing its zeal, and vastly extending its influence, making it tell with tremendous power on the world around it? On the other hand, if the elders from any cause, perform little, if any, of this pastoral oversight, each one in his respective portion of his Church, how can it be otherwise than that the Church should suffer deeply in her spiritual interests? Here, as we have seen, is the precise means appointed by infinite wisdom, to counteract the benumbing influences of the world—to secure the increasing spirituality, zeal and devotedness of the professed believer—by securing, through the spirit, to the truth its due effect. If the means be neglected, how can the end be attained? This neglect may in part indeed be made up by the increased diligence and activity of the minister in pastoral labours—but only in part—and in all such cases the pulpit must suffer—this is the inevitable consequence.

A sister denomination, by her class leaders, seeks to secure the important advantages of a constant fraternal watch, assistance, admonition and counsel to every member in her communion, so as always to make each one feel his and her connection with the whole body—that it is not a mere nominal thing; the Presbyterian Church has, as we all believe, a divinely appointed system, perfectly adapted, and most certainly designed by the adorable Head of the Church himself, to accomplish, without the attendant evils of the plan alluded to, the same important result, and far more—and yet, while they, with praiseworthy perseverance, carry out their plan of man's devising, we let this plan of God's lie almost idle—useless for the great ends for which it was designed! How shall we answer to our Master for this?

3. After all that has been said about the cause of the Church's comparatively small success, do we not here see at least one cause of it, and a very powerful one too: and does it not really appear from this subject, that so far as the instrumentality is concerned, here is the point of our greatest failure? That the Church does not exert the power she ought, nor achieve for her crucified and risen Lord the triumphs she might, all of us sadly feel to be too true. When we look upon our own beloved Zion, and mark with glowing hearts of thankfulness, her unity, her compactness, her influential position, her scriptural standards, and her beautiful and apostolic organization, so well adapted to secure the most glorious results, and contrast with this her comparatively slow advance and meagre conquests, we may well

feel mortified and humbled. We may not indeed forget the injunction of heavenly wisdom, "Say ye not that former times were better than these," and mistaking some of the eddies in the great current of the church's progress for the current itself, become alarmists, as if the world was going backward, and every tendency was to evil. While on the one hand as we turn to a carping infidelity, or to the morbid croaking of mistaken friends, we may silence both by the proof that the church does exert a power for good sufficient to prove that God is in her of a truth, an influence greater far than ever before in the world, not even excepting apostolic times, and that her course is onward; and rejoice in the prospect of the early dawning of her millenial glory; must we not, on the other hand, as we look back to Gethsemane and Calvary, and up to her Omnipotent Head on the throne of the universe, and abroad over a perishing world for which he died, see much, very much, to humble us before God, and to make us anxiously inquire, Why with so much to do, such motives to do it, and Omnipotence pledged to her help she accomplishes so little?

Look at our last Synodical report. There we learn that in 165 churches, with 129 ministers, and 11,525 communicants there has been an increase of only 111 souls; as there remarked, "only one each to about two-thirds of our churches, and not one to each minister." And is this the way, blessed and furnished as we are, that we are working for God? Why this disgraceful and humiliating result? The answer may be summarily given, and properly too, that it is because the church has so little of the spirit of her divine Head; a new baptism of the Holy Ghost is needed, by whose influences alone the worm Jacob can thresh the mountains. But it will not do to stop here. The inquiry at once presses upon us, Why have we so little of the Spirit? By the very appointment of a special instrumentality to accomplish a definite result, it is implied that that result shall be accomplished whenever the instrumentality is used. To appoint means for bringing about a particular end, and these means fail, when used, to do it, argues either folly or weakness or both; and to assert this of the means appointed by God for the accomplishment of his clearly defined purposes of mercy to a fallen world would be blasphemy. By the very appointment of an instrumentality, and the specific promises given to it, God has inseparably linked to that instrumentality in all its movements, the power necessary to accomplish its object. His wisdom and faithfulness stand pledged to make the means of his own appointment successful. If then they be not so, at least to the degree they ought; if the arrows of truth instead of being sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies, fall powerless at their feet; if the church mourns the absence of those influences which are her only strength and glory, and consequently marches with feeble faltering step, instead of with the firm tread of triumph, it must be because she is not using the means of his appointment. Now the power of the church is just the power of godliness,—the appointed means of her success, then, can be no other than those intended to secure the efficacy of the truth on each believer's heart;

and to make him vividly realize his connection with the whole church of his Redeemer, thus enlisting all his activities in all her great enterprises. The great question then for us to answer is,—Are these means faithfully and diligently used? We have already seen that they are not. Can we hesitate then as to the reasons of our small success?

If, then, my brethren, we would see our Zion arise in the might of her king; if we would have a holier and more devoted people; if we would see our churches putting forth their energies with more of that zeal that becomes those purchased by the blood of Jesus; if, instead of the worldliness and selfishness and apathy which rests as a mighty incubus upon her, we would see her joyfully coming forth, and pouring her wealth into the treasury of the Lord, and devoting her sons and daughters to his arduous service at home and abroad; if we would have not merely a temporary revival, soon to subside again into a still deeper apathy, but a permanently elevated standard of feeling and duty, and a measure of success greatly beyond any thing we have yet habitually enjoyed, we must give to our office of ruling elder its proper influence. A more pervading, everywhere operative agency than public appeals, or ecclesiastical resolutions, or any machinery we can devise, is needed to bring the church more fully up to the measure of her duty. Our elders must be bishops and pastors and guides, and watchers for souls. The church must expect this from them. Every district of every church must have its overseer, and he must so watch for souls as one who must give account. Every member of our churches must be brought under the influence of this continued inspection, and never allowed to forget his union with the body, or cease to feel its influence.

The destinies of the church are thus very much in the hands of the ruling elders. It is for you, my fathers and brethren in the eldership, under God, by your quiet and humble, but not on that account less powerful instrumentality, to develope her resources and to call forth her energies. It is for you by your diligent co-operation as bishops and pastors, vastly to increase the efficiency of the ministry. Upon you the church must depend as the great instrument of God's appointment in causing her to rise and shine and put on her beautiful garments. If she is to come forth "as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," it must be under the zealous and holy guidance of her rulers. And never were there such loud calls upon her for self-denying effort as now when the din of busy preparation for the final conflict is everywhere heard, and the piteous cry for help from many a perishing nation is unanswered. The whole world is in expectation. A new era is approaching. The day is dawning. If our beloved church would stand side by side with others in that day when the banner of the cross shall wave in triumph over every land, we must all "come up to the help of the Lord" with new zeal, and especially must her rulers be in fuller sympathy with her king. *Let then the elders that rule, rule well,* and let them *be counted worthy of double honor.*